	Vanguard Learning Trust *As a group of local primary and secondary schools, Vanguard Learning Trust's mission is to serve its local community by providing outstanding, inclusive education. We have a collective purpose and responsibility to provide effective teaching, through a curriculum based on equality of opportunity and entitlement that allows our students to shine both in and out of the classroom. Each school in the Trust has its own ethos, which also complements the Trust's vision and values, and the common aspiration that all students can achieve their potential.*

Safeguarding and child protection policy
Part A: Trust-wide

Summer 2026

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Part A: Trust-wide

1. Overview of policy

1.1 Introduction

Vanguard Learning Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. The Trust believes that every child, regardless of age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or family circumstances, has the right to grow up in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment where they are protected from harm, listened to, respected and encouraged to flourish. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Every adult working within the Trust has both an individual and collective responsibility to identify concerns, share information appropriately, act promptly and always place the welfare and best interests of children at the centre of every decision. Effective safeguarding extends beyond compliance with statutory duties. It is built through trusted relationships, professional curiosity, reflective practice and a culture in which children feel safe to speak, confident that they will be listened to and assured that concerns will be taken seriously. The Trust recognises that children often communicate their worries through behaviour, changes in presentation or small pieces of information over time, rather than through direct disclosure. Every interaction with a child therefore matters. Every school within the Trust shares a commitment to creating environments where safeguarding is embedded in every aspect of school life; it informs leadership, governance, curriculum design, staff development, behaviour, attendance, inclusion, pastoral care and decision-making. Safeguarding is not viewed as a standalone responsibility but as an integral part of providing an outstanding, inclusive education and enabling every child to achieve their full potential.

1.2 Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- establish a consistent Trust-wide approach to safeguarding and child protection;
- ensure compliance with all relevant safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance;
- clarify the safeguarding responsibilities of trustees, governors, leaders, staff, parents/carers, students and volunteers;
- promote a culture in which safeguarding is understood to be everyone's responsibility;
- ensure that children know they will be listened to, believed and supported;
- provide a framework for identifying, responding to and managing safeguarding concerns;
- promote effective partnership working with parents/carers and safeguarding agencies;
- support the early identification of need and timely access to Family Help and specialist services;
- ensure that safeguarding arrangements are subject to regular monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance; and
- promote continuous improvement across all schools within the Trust.

The Trust recognises that every child is unique. Whilst this policy establishes a consistent safeguarding framework across all schools, safeguarding decisions will always be centred on the individual child, recognising their lived experience, strengths, needs and circumstances. The Trust is committed to ensuring that every child is treated with dignity, compassion and respect, and that professional judgement is exercised to ensure the right support is provided at the right time.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to:

- trustees
- members of local governing bodies
- headteachers
- all employees
- agency staff
- volunteers
- contractors working on behalf of the Trust
- supply staff
- trainee teachers

- work experience students
- visitors working directly with children.

Every individual working on behalf of the Trust is expected to understand and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities irrespective of their role. This policy should be read alongside each school's Part B, which sets out school-specific safeguarding arrangements, local procedures and contact details of key staff.

1.4 Relationship between this policy and the Trust's safeguarding handbook

This policy establishes the Trust's statutory safeguarding responsibilities, principles, expectations and governance arrangements. Operational guidance describing how these responsibilities are implemented and quality assured is contained within the Trust's internal safeguarding handbook, which includes:

- safeguarding quality assurance arrangements
- professional supervision
- safeguarding governance
- safeguarding assurance activities
- Trust safeguarding meetings
- school safeguarding visits
- safeguarding action planning
- monitoring arrangements
- evidence-informed quality assurance processes.

The policy and handbook are designed to be read together by staff.

1.5 Safeguarding principles

The Trust's safeguarding arrangements are underpinned by the following principles, which are aligned with those set out in the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (click here):

- **The welfare of the child is paramount**. Every safeguarding decision must place the child's safety, wellbeing and best interests at the centre.
- **Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility**. Every adult working for, or on behalf of, the Trust has a responsibility to identify concerns, share information appropriately and take timely action.
- **Every child has the right to feel safe, valued, respected and listened to**. Children should know that they will be taken seriously, treated with dignity and supported throughout any safeguarding process.
- **Some children may require additional or different support to achieve the same level of safety and protection**. Safeguarding practice should therefore be equitable, recognising individual needs, lived experiences and barriers to seeking help.
- **Safeguarding decisions should be informed by professional curiosity, evidence and an understanding of the child's lived experience**. Staff should remain alert to the possibility that concerns may emerge gradually and that children do not always communicate abuse directly.
- **Effective safeguarding depends upon strong relationships and partnership working**. Schools cannot safeguard children in isolation and must work collaboratively with families, safeguarding partners and other agencies.
- **Safeguarding practice should be reflective and continually improving**. The Trust will learn from safeguarding practice, audits, reviews, research and national developments to strengthen safeguarding arrangements and improve outcomes for children.

1.6 The Trust's 'culture of vigilance'

The Trust is committed to creating and sustaining a culture in which safeguarding is embedded throughout every aspect of school life and understood to be everyone's responsibility. A strong safeguarding culture is characterised by:

- visible leadership that prioritises safeguarding;
- children who feel safe, respected and confident that concerns will be taken seriously;
- staff who understand their safeguarding responsibilities and feel confident to act;
- professional curiosity and respectful challenge;

- strong relationships with children, families and partner agencies;
- evidence-informed decision-making;
- reflective professional practice; and
- continual evaluation and improvement of safeguarding arrangements.

Safeguarding is not viewed as a standalone responsibility but as an integral part of providing an outstanding, inclusive education. The Trust seeks assurance not only that statutory requirements are met, but that safeguarding arrangements are effective in improving children's experiences and outcomes. The culture of safeguarding is monitored through leadership, governance and quality assurance processes described within the Trust's safeguarding handbook.

1.7 Statutory framework

This policy has been developed in accordance with current legislation and statutory guidance, including (but not limited to):

- 'Keeping children safe in education' (Department for Education, September 2026)
- 'Working together to safeguard children'
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- Education Act 2002
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Government Prevent Duty guidance
- 'Information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services'
- all relevant local safeguarding partnership procedures.

The principal legislation, statutory guidance and related Trust documentation that underpin this policy are listed in **Appendix 1**. Where statutory guidance is updated between scheduled reviews of this policy, the Trust will have due regard to the revised guidance and will incorporate any necessary amendments at the next review.

2. Aims

2.1 Overview

The aims of this policy are to ensure that the Trust:

- provides a consistent Trust-wide framework for safeguarding and child protection;
- fulfils all statutory safeguarding responsibilities placed upon schools and multi-academy trusts;
- promotes a safe, inclusive and supportive environment in which every child can learn, develop and thrive;
- identifies children who require help or protection at the earliest opportunity;
- ensures timely access to Family Help, children's social care and other specialist services where appropriate;
- protects children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, radicalisation and harm occurring both online and offline;
- ensures all adults understand and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities;
- promotes effective partnership working with parents, carers and safeguarding agencies;
- develops safeguarding practice through effective governance, quality assurance and professional learning; and
- continually strengthens safeguarding arrangements in response to emerging risks, developments in legislation and learning from practice.

2.2 Keeping the child at the centre

Every safeguarding decision made by the Trust should begin by considering the child's best interests. Children may not always recognise that they are experiencing abuse, neglect or exploitation, nor may they feel ready or able to disclose concerns because of fear, shame, coercion, loyalty, disability,

communication needs or previous experiences of not being heard. Staff should therefore remain professionally curious and recognise that safeguarding concerns are not always communicated directly. Schools will seek to understand each child's lived experience, build trusted relationships and take account of children's wishes and feelings wherever appropriate. Whilst the views of children are central to safeguarding practice, decisions will always prioritise their safety, welfare and long-term best interests.

2.3 Continuous improvement

The Trust is committed to continually strengthening safeguarding practice through evidence-informed quality assurance, professional reflection and organisational learning. Safeguarding arrangements will be reviewed regularly through monitoring activities, safeguarding audits, professional supervision, external review, safeguarding practice reviews, student voice, staff feedback and partnership working. Leaders recognise that safeguarding must evolve alongside emerging risks, changes in legislation and developments in technology. The Trust will use this learning to evaluate and improve safeguarding arrangements across all schools, ensuring they remain effective, proportionate and responsive to the needs of children.

3. Equality, diversity and inclusion

3.1 Equality statement

The Trust is committed to ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are fair, equitable and inclusive for every child. Safeguarding practice will always take account of each child's individual circumstances, lived experiences, identity, communication needs and protected characteristics. The Trust recognises that children may experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities and that these can increase the likelihood of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Staff will avoid making assumptions about children or families and will respond to concerns using evidence, professional judgement and curiosity rather than stereotypes or unconscious bias.

3.2 Children who may require additional safeguarding support

Whilst every child has an equal right to protection, the Trust recognises that some children may face additional barriers to recognising abuse, accessing support or making themselves heard. Safeguarding practice should therefore be equitable rather than simply equal, recognising that different children may require different forms or levels of support in order to achieve the same level of safety and protection. Staff should avoid making assumptions about a child's level of risk based solely on personal characteristics or group membership. Safeguarding decisions should always be informed by evidence and an understanding of the child's individual circumstances and lived experience. Further guidance regarding children who may require additional safeguarding support is provided in Section 15**.**

3.3 Equality Act 2010

In carrying out safeguarding responsibilities, the Trust will fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Trust recognises that safeguarding practice should:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- advance equality of opportunity;
- foster good relations between different groups;
- remove barriers that prevent children accessing support;
- make reasonable adjustments where required; and
- ensure safeguarding arrangements remain accessible to all children.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Safeguarding responsibilities

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children has a role to play in protecting them from harm and promoting their welfare. No single professional can have a full picture of a child's circumstances. Effective safeguarding therefore depends upon timely information sharing, professional curiosity, respectful challenge and effective multi-agency working. Every adult working for, or on behalf of, the Trust must:

- maintain an attitude of "it could happen here";
- always act in the best interests of the child;
- know how to recognise indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns;
- record concerns promptly and accurately;
- share concerns with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) without delay;
- contribute to safeguarding plans where appropriate;
- undertake safeguarding training;
- understand their individual safeguarding responsibilities;
- contribute to creating a culture in which children feel safe to seek help.

The Trust supports staff to fulfil these responsibilities through comprehensive safeguarding induction, regular statutory and role-specific training, clear reporting and information sharing procedures, safeguarding supervision and a culture of professional curiosity and continuous safeguarding vigilance. Further detail is provided throughout this policy, particularly in Sections 12, 13, 22 and 23.

4.2 Board of trustees

The board of trustees has overall strategic responsibility for ensuring that the Trust complies with its safeguarding and child protection duties. The board will ensure that:

- safeguarding remains a strategic priority across the Trust;
- effective safeguarding arrangements are in place in every school;
- statutory safeguarding responsibilities are fulfilled in accordance with current legislation and Department for Education guidance;
- safeguarding policies are reviewed and approved at least annually, or sooner where statutory guidance changes;
- sufficient resources are allocated to enable effective safeguarding practice;
- appropriate safeguarding leadership capacity exists across the Trust;
- safeguarding is subject to effective governance, monitoring and quality assurance;
- regular safeguarding assurance reports are received from the Trust's safeguarding lead;
- safeguarding risks are appropriately identified, monitored and managed;
- lessons arising from safeguarding reviews, audits, complaints, serious incidents and inspections inform continuous improvement; and
- there is an organisational culture in which safeguarding is understood to be everyone's responsibility.

The board seeks this assurance through regular safeguarding assurance reports from the Trust's safeguarding lead; meetings between the Trust's safeguarding lead and the safeguarding link trustee; scrutiny of safeguarding performance information, safeguarding audits and quality assurance findings; monitoring safeguarding risks identified through school safeguarding action plans; and ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements across the Trust (see Sections 27 and 28).

4.3 Local governing bodies

Each local governing body is responsible for seeking assurance that safeguarding arrangements are effective within its school. Local governing bodies will:

- appoint a safeguarding link governor;
- receive regular safeguarding reports from the designated safeguarding lead;
- monitor safeguarding priorities and emerging safeguarding themes, which are outlined in the school's safeguarding action plan and in link-governor school visit reports;
- provide strategic support and constructive challenge to school leaders;
- monitor implementation of this policy and the school's Part B safeguarding arrangements;
- ensure safeguarding remains a standing agenda item at governing body meetings;
- satisfy themselves that appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place and effective;
- monitor safer recruitment arrangements;
- review safeguarding training and statutory compliance;
- seek assurance that children receive timely support; and

- contribute to the Trust's wider safeguarding quality assurance framework.

Governors will not become involved in operational safeguarding decisions or individual case management. Local governing bodies seek assurance through regular safeguarding reports from safeguarding link governors following their termly school visits, discussions with school leaders and designated safeguarding leads, a review of relevant safeguarding documentation and quality assurance findings, monitoring of safeguarding action plans and training compliance, and by triangulating evidence from a range of sources (see Sections 27 and 28).

4.4 Chief executive officer (CEO)

The CEO provides strategic leadership across the Trust and is accountable to the board of trustees for ensuring that safeguarding remains a central organisational priority. The CEO will:

- promote a strong safeguarding culture across all schools;
- ensure safeguarding informs Trust strategic planning;
- support headteachers in fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities;
- receive assurance regarding safeguarding effectiveness across the Trust;
- ensure appropriate safeguarding leadership capacity is maintained; and
- work closely with the Trust's safeguarding lead and safeguarding trustee to address emerging safeguarding risks.

The CEO seeks assurance regarding safeguarding effectiveness through regular discussions with the Trust's safeguarding lead during central education team meetings; by reviewing information arising from Trust DSL forum meetings, safeguarding quality assurance activities and emerging safeguarding themes; and through immediate communication where serious incidents, significant risks or other urgent safeguarding matters require executive oversight.

4.5 Trust safeguarding lead

The Trust's safeguarding lead provides strategic leadership, professional support and quality assurance across the Trust. Working collaboratively with school leaders, designated safeguarding leads, governors and trustees, the Trust's safeguarding lead will promote consistent, high-quality safeguarding practice across every school. The safeguarding lead will:

- **Strategic leadership**
  - provide strategic leadership for safeguarding across the Trust;
  - promote a culture of vigilance, openness and continual improvement;
  - co-ordinate Trust safeguarding priorities;
  - monitor national safeguarding developments and advise schools regarding implementation;
  - lead the review and development of safeguarding policies, procedures and guidance.
- **Quality assurance**
  - co-ordinate Trust safeguarding quality assurance activities;
  - monitor safeguarding compliance across schools;
  - analyse safeguarding themes, trends and emerging risks;
  - support schools in evaluating safeguarding effectiveness;
  - oversee Trust safeguarding action planning;
  - complete safeguarding audits where appropriate.
- **Professional support**
  - chair Trust DSL meetings;
  - facilitate safeguarding forums and professional learning;
  - provide professional supervision for DSLs;
  - support schools following serious safeguarding incidents where appropriate;
  - promote collaborative learning and the sharing of effective safeguarding practice.
- **Governance**
  - provide safeguarding assurance reports to trustees;
  - work alongside safeguarding link governors;
  - support governance development;

- maintain oversight of Trust safeguarding priorities;
- escalate significant safeguarding concerns where appropriate.

Further operational arrangements relating to the Trust's safeguarding lead are contained within the Trust's safeguarding handbook, including the arrangements for DSL supervision and professional support, Trust chairing of the Trust's professional learning community, safeguarding action planning and governance reporting.

4.6 Headteachers

Headteachers have overall responsibility for safeguarding and child protection within their school.
They will ensure that:

- safeguarding remains central to school leadership;
- safeguarding forms part of school improvement planning;
- the DSL is appropriately supported, challenged and resourced;
- the DSL and any deputy DSLs have the appropriate skills, knowledge, training, status and capacity to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively;
- appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure continuity of safeguarding leadership, including effective induction, handover and support when appointing a new or temporary DSL or deputy DSL;
- sufficient staffing capacity exists to fulfil safeguarding responsibilities;
- safeguarding policies are implemented consistently;
- safeguarding concerns are responded to appropriately;
- safeguarding is embedded throughout the curriculum and wider school life;
- staff understand and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities;
- safeguarding concerns relating to adults are managed appropriately;
- safeguarding records are maintained appropriately;
- safeguarding quality assurance activities are undertaken;
- governors receive accurate safeguarding information; and
- the school contributes fully to Trust safeguarding arrangements.

On a routine basis, headteachers are expected to promote and model a strong safeguarding culture by ensuring safeguarding is a regular feature of staff meetings and professional discussions, encouraging professional curiosity and reflective practice, creating an environment in which staff feel confident to raise concerns and seek advice, challenging poor practice where necessary, and celebrating effective safeguarding practice.

4.7 Designated safeguarding lead (DSL)

The DSL takes lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection within the school. The DSL will be an appropriately trained senior member of staff with the knowledge, status, authority and capacity necessary to fulfil the role effectively. Deputy DSLs may undertake safeguarding activities but ultimate responsibility remains with the DSL.

- **Strategic leadership**

  The DSL will:

  - lead the school's safeguarding arrangements;
  - promote a positive safeguarding culture;
  - advise and support staff regarding safeguarding matters;
  - ensure safeguarding remains central to school improvement;
  - maintain oversight of safeguarding priorities;
  - identify emerging safeguarding risks;
  - promote reflective safeguarding practice.

- **Child protection**

  The DSL will:

  - manage referrals to children's social care, the police, Channel, the Disclosure and Barring Service and other agencies where appropriate;
  - maintain oversight of all child protection activity;

- ensure children receive timely support;
- monitor vulnerable students;
- co-ordinate multi-agency working;
- attend and contribute to safeguarding meetings;
- ensure safeguarding concerns remain under review until appropriate outcomes are achieved.

➢ **Record keeping**

The DSL will ensure that safeguarding records are:

- accurate
- factual
- timely
- secure
- regularly reviewed
- appropriately transferred when children move schools
- used proactively to identify safeguarding themes, risks and patterns.

The DSL should ensure that records include the professional rationale underpinning significant safeguarding decisions wherever appropriate.

➢ **Staff support**

The DSL will:

- provide safeguarding advice to staff;
- support staff following safeguarding incidents;
- identify safeguarding learning needs;
- contribute to safeguarding induction;
- promote professional curiosity; and
- encourage timely reporting of concerns.

➢ **Quality assurance**

The DSL will:

- monitor safeguarding practice across the school;
- review safeguarding data and trends;
- evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding interventions;
- contribute to Trust safeguarding quality assurance activities;
- participate in professional supervision;
- work collaboratively with governors and the Trust's safeguarding lead; and
- support continuous safeguarding improvement.

➢ **Safeguarding education**

The DSL will work alongside senior leaders to ensure children receive an effective safeguarding curriculum that enables them to:

- recognise abuse;
- understand healthy relationships;
- stay safe online;
- recognise grooming and exploitation;
- understand consent;
- seek help confidently; and
- identify trusted adults.

➢ **Emerging safeguarding risks**

The DSL should maintain awareness of new safeguarding challenges including:

- AI-generated abuse
- deepfake and manipulated imagery
- online exploitation
- technology-facilitated abuse
- harmful sexual behaviour
- criminal exploitation
- county lines

- radicalisation
- serious violence
- emerging local safeguarding themes.

4.8 Deputy designated safeguarding leads (DDSLs)

The Trust recognises that effective safeguarding requires appropriate leadership capacity. Each school will appoint one or more appropriately trained deputy DSLs to ensure safeguarding responsibilities can be fulfilled effectively at all times. Deputy DSLs will:

- undertake safeguarding duties delegated by the DSL;
- provide safeguarding advice and support to staff;
- respond to safeguarding concerns in the absence of the DSL;
- contribute to child protection planning and multi-agency working;
- maintain accurate safeguarding records;
- attend safeguarding training appropriate to the role;
- contribute to safeguarding quality assurance activities; and
- participate in Trust safeguarding meetings and professional development where appropriate.

Whilst day-to-day responsibilities may be delegated, ultimate lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection remains with the DSL.

4.9 All staff

4.9.1 Overview

Every member of staff has an individual responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Staff must recognise that safeguarding is not solely the responsibility of the designated safeguarding lead. Every adult working within the Trust may identify the first signs that a child requires help or protection. Accordingly, all staff must:

- maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here';
- act in the best interests of the child at all times;
- know the identity of the designated safeguarding lead and deputy DSLs;
- understand and follow this policy and their school's Part B arrangements;
- read and understand Part One of 'Keeping children safe in education';
- undertake safeguarding and child protection training at induction and receive regular safeguarding updates thereafter;
- recognise indicators of abuse, neglect, exploitation and safeguarding concerns;
- understand that abuse may occur in person, online or through a combination of both;
- understand the additional vulnerabilities that some children may experience;
- recognise prejudice-based harm, including racism, faith-based prejudice and other forms of discrimination, and understand that such experiences may affect a child's welfare, wellbeing, mental health, sense of safety and willingness to seek help;
- respond promptly to disclosures and safeguarding concerns;
- record safeguarding concerns accurately, objectively and without delay;
- share concerns with the DSL immediately;
- contribute to safeguarding plans where appropriate;
- work collaboratively with safeguarding partners;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries; and
- challenge poor safeguarding practice where necessary.

Staff should never assume that another person has acted upon a concern. Where there is uncertainty, staff should always seek advice from the DSL.

4.9.2 Professional curiosity

The Trust expects all staff to demonstrate professional curiosity. Professional curiosity involves asking questions, seeking clarification, recognising inconsistencies, respectfully challenging assumptions and considering whether presenting information fully reflects a child's lived experience. Staff should remain alert to changes in behaviour, attendance, appearance, presentation or relationships that may indicate a

child requires additional help or protection. Professional curiosity should be exercised with empathy, respect and an awareness of each child's individual circumstances.

4.9.3 Recording concerns

Staff must ensure safeguarding records are:

- completed as soon as reasonably practicable after a concern arises;
- factual and objective;
- distinguish clearly between fact, observation, opinion and professional judgement;
- sufficiently detailed to enable informed safeguarding decisions;
- include actions taken;
- include decisions reached;
- include professional rationale where appropriate; and
- be recorded using the school's agreed safeguarding recording system.

Good safeguarding records support effective decision-making, continuity of support and multi-agency working.

4.10 Volunteers

Volunteers play an important role within Trust schools and are expected to contribute to safeguarding children. All volunteers will:

- receive safeguarding information appropriate to their role;
- understand how to report safeguarding concerns;
- work within the school's safeguarding procedures;
- maintain professional boundaries; and
- immediately report any safeguarding concern to the DSL.

The level of safeguarding training and supervision provided will reflect the nature of the volunteer's role and the level of contact they have with children. Where a Trust school is subject to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, a volunteer must not be permitted to begin working within provision covered by the EYFS framework until the school has received the volunteer's enhanced DBS certificate, including children's barred list information.

4.11 Supply staff, agency staff and contractors

Children should receive the same level of safeguarding protection irrespective of who is working within the school. Accordingly, all temporary staff, agency staff, contractors and visiting professionals working regularly with children will receive safeguarding information appropriate to their role before commencing work. They will be expected to:

- understand the school's safeguarding procedures;
- know how to contact the DSL;
- report safeguarding concerns immediately;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries; and
- comply with the Trust's safeguarding expectations whilst working on Trust premises.

4.12 Students

Safeguarding is most effective when children understand how to seek help and know they will be listened to. The Trust will ensure that students:

- are taught about safeguarding through a broad and balanced curriculum;
- understand healthy and respectful relationships;
- learn how to recognise abuse, exploitation and inappropriate behaviour;
- understand how to stay safe online;
- know how to report concerns;
- know who their trusted adults are;
- understand that they will be listened to and taken seriously; and
- contribute their views to safeguarding developments where appropriate.

Children should never feel responsible for managing safeguarding concerns themselves.

4.13 Parents and carers

The Trust recognises that parents and carers are usually best placed to safeguard and promote their children's welfare. The Trust will work openly and collaboratively with parents wherever possible. Parents and carers are expected to:

- support the school's safeguarding arrangements;
- share relevant safeguarding information with the school;
- work collaboratively with safeguarding professionals;
- support their child's attendance and wellbeing; and
- promote safe online behaviour.

Where safeguarding concerns indicate that informing parents may place a child at increased risk of harm, the Trust will act in accordance with statutory safeguarding guidance and advice from safeguarding partners.

4.14 Multi-agency working

Effective safeguarding depends upon effective partnership working. The Trust will work collaboratively with:

- children's social care
- Family Help services
- safeguarding partners
- health professionals
- police
- education providers
- virtual schools
- youth justice services
- voluntary organisations
- other relevant agencies

The Trust recognises that no single agency can meet all of a child's needs. Staff will:

- share information appropriately and lawfully;
- contribute to assessments;
- attend multi-agency meetings;
- challenge decisions respectfully where necessary;
- escalate concerns where appropriate; and
- maintain a child-centred approach throughout.

4.15 Escalation and professional challenge

Where staff believe that appropriate action has not been taken to safeguard a child, they should not assume that another professional will resolve the matter. The Trust expects staff to:

- seek clarification where decisions are unclear;
- respectfully challenge professional decisions where necessary;
- escalate concerns through appropriate safeguarding procedures; and
- continue to advocate for children until they are satisfied that risks have been appropriately addressed.

Constructive professional challenge is recognised as an important element of effective safeguarding practice and contributes to improved outcomes for children.

5. Recognising safeguarding concerns

5.1 Introduction

Abuse, neglect, exploitation and safeguarding concerns can affect any child, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, culture, religion, sexual orientation or family circumstances. Staff should recognise that safeguarding concerns rarely occur in isolation. Children may experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously, and concerns frequently develop gradually over time rather than presenting as a single incident. The Trust expects all staff to remain vigilant and professionally curious, recognising that changes

in behaviour, presentation, relationships, attendance or emotional wellbeing may indicate that a child requires additional support or protection. Recognising abuse, neglect and exploitation is not always straightforward. Whilst this section outlines the Trust's approach, detailed indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation are provided in **Appendix 2** to support staff in identifying concerns at the earliest opportunity.

5.2 Abuse may occur anywhere

Staff should understand that abuse may occur:

- within the family;
- within the wider community;
- in educational settings;
- within peer relationships;
- through organised exploitation;
- online; and/or
- simultaneously online and offline.

Children may experience abuse from adults, other children or groups of individuals. Safeguarding assessments should therefore consider the child's wider lived experience rather than focusing solely upon individual incidents.

5.3 Extra-familial harm

The Trust recognises that many safeguarding risks arise outside the family environment. These may include:

- child criminal exploitation
- child sexual exploitation
- county lines
- serious youth violence
- harmful sexual behaviour
- child-on-child abuse
- exploitation through social media
- coercive relationships
- technology-facilitated abuse
- radicalisation
- online grooming
- financial exploitation.

Staff should consider contextual safeguarding whenever concerns arise.

5.4 Prejudice-based and discriminatory harm

The Trust recognises that prejudice-based harm, including racism, faith-targeted abuse and other forms of discrimination, can constitute a safeguarding concern in its own right. Such experiences may significantly affect a child's welfare, wellbeing, mental health, sense of safety and willingness to seek help. Staff must recognise, record and respond appropriately to concerns relating to prejudice-based or discriminatory harm and consider their impact within the wider safeguarding context. Discriminatory behaviour may also constitute child-on-child abuse. Child-on-child abuse can include discriminatory behaviour, racism, faith-targeted abuse, prejudice-based bullying and other prejudice-based incidents. Such behaviour must be taken seriously and should not be dismissed as banter, conflict or an ordinary feature of peer relationships.

5.5 Technology-facilitated abuse

Technology is now a significant feature of many safeguarding concerns. Children may experience abuse through:

- social media
- gaming platforms
- messaging services
- livestreaming

- image-sharing platforms
- artificial intelligence
- anonymous communication platforms.

Many children experience abuse that occurs both online and offline simultaneously. Staff should therefore avoid viewing online safety as a separate safeguarding issue. Instead, online abuse should be considered within the wider safeguarding context.

5.6 AI-enabled safeguarding risks

The Trust recognises that advances in artificial intelligence (AI) presents new safeguarding risks. Staff should remain alert to concerns involving:

- AI-generated nude or semi-nude imagery
- deepfakes
- 'deep nudes'
- digitally manipulated images
- image-based abuse
- AI-assisted grooming
- impersonation
- sextortion
- synthetic child sexual abuse material
- AI-generated bullying or harassment

Children should be supported in reporting concerns relating to AI-enabled abuse in exactly the same way as any other safeguarding concern. Incidents should be managed in accordance with statutory guidance, online safety procedures and safeguarding principles. The Trust will review emerging technologies regularly to ensure safeguarding arrangements remain effective.

6. What staff should do if they have concerns about a child

6.1 Immediate action

Every member of staff has a responsibility to recognise, respond to and report safeguarding concerns promptly. Staff should never assume that somebody else has taken action. Where a member of staff has any concern, however small, they must report it immediately to the DSL or a deputy DSL. Safeguarding is rarely about one significant event; more commonly it is the cumulative impact of a number of seemingly low-level concerns that indicates a child may need help or protection. However, if there is immediate danger or a child requires urgent protection, staff should contact emergency services or children's social care without delay before informing the DSL as soon as possible afterwards. Practical guidance for responding to safeguarding concerns and disclosures is provided in **Appendix 3**.

6.2 Listen

If a child chooses to disclose abuse, staff should:

- remain calm;
- listen carefully;
- avoid interrupting;
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing by speaking;
- explain that information cannot be kept secret if someone is at risk of harm;
- avoid asking leading questions;
- avoid investigating; and
- avoid making promises that cannot be kept.

Children should always be reassured that they are being taken seriously.

6.3 Record

As soon as possible after the disclosure or concern, staff should make a written safeguarding record. The record should include:

- what was observed;
- what was said (using the child's own words wherever possible);

- who was present;
- date and time;
- actions taken;
- professional observations; and
- any immediate safeguarding concerns.

Records should distinguish clearly between:

- fact
- observation
- opinion
- professional judgement.

6.4 Report

Safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately using the school's agreed safeguarding reporting system. Staff should not:

- delay reporting;
- investigate concerns themselves;
- inform parents without advice from the DSL where safeguarding concerns exist; or
- attempt to determine whether abuse has occurred.

Their responsibility is to recognise, record and report concerns.

6.5 The role of the DSL following a concern

Following receipt of a safeguarding concern, the DSL will consider:

- the child's immediate safety;
- previous safeguarding history;
- vulnerability factors;
- the child's wishes and feelings where appropriate;
- whether Family Help is appropriate;
- whether children's social care should be involved;
- whether police involvement is required;
- whether additional school-based support is required; and
- whether other agencies should be consulted.

All safeguarding decisions should be:

- child-centred;
- evidence-informed;
- proportionate;
- clearly recorded; and
- regularly reviewed.

7. Family Help

7.1 Early support

The Trust recognises that effective safeguarding begins long before statutory intervention becomes necessary. Schools are uniquely placed to identify emerging concerns through daily contact with children and families and therefore play a vital role in ensuring support is provided at the earliest opportunity. Family Help seeks to strengthen family resilience by providing timely, co-ordinated support before concerns escalate. All staff should remain alert to children whose circumstances suggest they may benefit from additional help and should work collaboratively with the DSL to determine the most appropriate response. Early support is most effective when delivered in partnership with children, parents, carers and other agencies, recognising both the strengths within families and the barriers they may be experiencing. A summary of Family Help and safeguarding thresholds is provided in **Appendix 4** to support professional judgement and decision-making alongside local safeguarding partnership guidance.

7.2 The role of schools

Schools contribute to effective Family Help by:

- recognising emerging needs at the earliest opportunity;
- working collaboratively with children and families;
- providing pastoral, educational and targeted support;
- contributing to Family Help assessments where appropriate;
- co-ordinating support with partner agencies;
- monitoring progress and reviewing outcomes; and
- escalating concerns where risks increase or needs are not being met.

7.3 Indicators that Family Help may be appropriate

Children and families may benefit from Family Help where there are emerging concerns such as:

- declining attendance
- emotional wellbeing difficulties
- family conflict
- parental mental ill health
- domestic abuse
- substance misuse
- housing instability
- financial hardship
- caring responsibilities
- behavioural changes
- unmet SEND needs.

The presence of one or more indicators does not automatically require Family Help. Decisions should always be based upon professional judgement, an understanding of the child's circumstances and consideration of cumulative need.

7.4 Family Help principles

Support should always be:

- child-centred;
- strengths-based;
- proportionate;
- co-ordinated;
- evidence-informed; and
- regularly reviewed.

The child's voice should remain central throughout planning and intervention.

7.5 Professional judgement

No threshold document can replace professional judgement. Where staff remain concerned, they should always discuss their concerns with the DSL. The Trust expects safeguarding professionals to remain professionally curious, seek advice where uncertainty exists and act promptly where children may require additional support or protection.

8. Working together to keep children safe

8.1 Getting children the right help

Effective safeguarding depends upon children receiving the right help at the right time. Where additional needs are identified, schools will work collaboratively with children, families and partner agencies to secure appropriate support through Family Help and other early intervention services wherever possible. Where concerns indicate that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the DSL will make an immediate referral to children's social care. In doing so, the Trust recognises the statutory responsibilities arising under Sections 17, 47, 20 and 31 of the Children Act 1989. Where appropriate, referrals may also be made to the police, health services, Channel and other safeguarding partners. Referrals relating to adults working with children, including to the local authority designated officer (LADO), the Disclosure and Barring Service and the Teaching Regulation Agency, will be managed in accordance with Section 14 of this policy. Following any referral, the DSL will continue to support

safeguarding arrangements by contributing fully to assessments, child protection planning, child in need arrangements and other multi-agency processes. Referral to children's social care should never be regarded as the end of the school's safeguarding responsibilities. Safeguarding arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure children continue to receive the right help at the right time.

8.2 Working with parents/carers

The Trust recognises that parents/carers are usually best placed to safeguard and promote the welfare of their children. Wherever possible, schools will work openly, honestly and collaboratively with parents and carers to support children's safety, wellbeing and development. Staff should seek to establish positive, respectful relationships with families and involve them in safeguarding planning wherever appropriate. In most circumstances, parents or carers will be informed when safeguarding concerns arise and before a referral is made to children's social care. However, parents will not be informed where doing so may:

- place a child at increased risk of significant harm;
- prejudice a police investigation;
- compromise a safeguarding enquiry;
- increase the likelihood of evidence being destroyed;
- place another person at risk; or
- conflict with advice provided by children's social care or the police.

The decision not to inform parents should always be discussed with the DSL and the rationale clearly recorded. Even where safeguarding concerns exist, schools should seek to maintain respectful professional relationships with parents wherever this remains compatible with safeguarding the child. The Trust recognises that positive relationships with families often contribute to improved safeguarding outcomes.

8.3 Multi-agency working

Children are best protected when professionals work together, share information appropriately and maintain a clear focus on the child's lived experience. The Trust recognises that no single professional or organisation can fully understand a child's circumstances or meet all of their safeguarding needs in isolation. Schools will work collaboratively with children's social care, Family Help services, health professionals, the police, education providers and other safeguarding partners to ensure children receive the right support at the right time. The DSL will co-ordinate the school's contribution to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including:

- sharing relevant safeguarding information;
- attending and contributing to multi-agency meetings;
- implementing agreed safeguarding actions;
- monitoring and reviewing safeguarding plans; and
- ensuring the child's voice remains central to all safeguarding decisions.

All staff are expected to contribute to effective multi-agency working in accordance with their professional responsibilities. The Trust expects staff to provide respectful and constructive professional challenge where they believe a child's needs are not being appropriately addressed. Where professional challenge does not result in appropriate action or improved outcomes for the child, the DSL should seek further support from the Trust's safeguarding lead. This reflects Stage 2 of the local authority's escalation and professional dispute resolution procedures (click here).

8.4 Information sharing

Effective safeguarding depends upon timely, lawful and proportionate information sharing. Staff should share relevant information whenever this is necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child. Concerns about data protection legislation should never prevent the sharing of information where there is a lawful safeguarding purpose. Where there is uncertainty, staff should seek advice from the DSL. However, this should never delay action where a child may be at risk of harm. Information sharing should always be:

- necessary
- proportionate

- relevant
- accurate
- timely
- secure
- shared only with those who need the information to safeguard or promote the welfare of the child.

Staff should ensure that information is shared in accordance with statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures and the Trust's information governance arrangements.

8.5 Recording safeguarding information and decisions

Clear, accurate and contemporaneous recording is an essential part of effective safeguarding practice. Significant safeguarding information, professional discussions, decisions and actions should be recorded promptly to support accountability, continuity of support and effective multi-agency working.

Safeguarding records should include:

- what information was shared;
- with whom it was shared;
- the reason for sharing (or not sharing) the information;
- when the information was shared; and
- the professional rationale underpinning safeguarding decisions.

All schools within the Trust use a common electronic safeguarding recording system. This supports consistent recording, secure transfer of safeguarding information, effective oversight, robust chronology building and Trust-wide safeguarding quality assurance.

8.6 Confidentiality

Safeguarding information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis with those who require the information to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child. Staff should treat safeguarding information with appropriate confidentiality. However, confidentiality should never prevent appropriate safeguarding action. Staff must never promise confidentiality to a child where safeguarding concerns exist and should always explain, in an age-appropriate manner, that information may need to be shared with those who can help keep them safe.

9. Children moving schools

The Trust recognises that safeguarding arrangements should continue seamlessly when children transfer between schools. The DSL will ensure that:

- child protection records are transferred securely;
- records are transferred separately from the main student file;
- receipt is confirmed by the receiving school;
- where possible, DSL-to-DSL discussions take place;
- vulnerable students receive appropriate transition support.

Particular attention should be given to:

- in-year admissions
- managed moves
- alternative provision
- post-16 transition

10. Concerns about adults working with children

10.1 Overview

The Trust recognises that maintaining a safe culture depends upon adults acting professionally and responding appropriately where concerns arise about the behaviour of colleagues. Every concern should be taken seriously, considered objectively and managed fairly, consistently and proportionately. Practical guidance relating to allegations, low-level concerns and whistleblowing is provided in **Appendix 5**. The Trust recognises that safeguarding expectations apply to professional conduct both within and outside the workplace, including online activity. Behaviour that occurs outside school, including through the use of

social media or other digital platforms, may raise safeguarding concerns where it indicates that an adult may pose a risk to children or may be unsuitable to work with them. Such concerns will be considered in accordance with statutory guidance, the Trust's staff code of conduct and this policy.

10.2 Harm threshold

Where there is a concern that an adult working with children may have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; and/or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children,

The concern must be treated seriously and responded to promptly, fairly and in accordance with statutory guidance. The headteacher (or, where appropriate, the chair of governors or chief executive officer) will ensure that the matter is managed in line with the procedures set out in 'Keeping children safe in education', including consultation with the LADO where required. The welfare of children will remain the paramount consideration throughout. The Trust will work collaboratively with relevant agencies, maintain appropriate confidentiality and ensure that concerns are managed fairly, consistently and without unnecessary delay.

10.3 Low-level concerns

A low-level concern is behaviour which is inconsistent with the Trust's staff code of conduct but does not meet the harm threshold. Such concerns may relate to conduct within or outside the workplace, including behaviour occurring online, where it gives rise to concerns about professional boundaries, professional judgement or an individual's suitability to work with children. The Trust promotes an open and transparent safeguarding culture in which all staff feel confident and supported to raise low-level concerns without fear of reprisal. Early identification and appropriate management of such concerns helps to maintain a safe culture, reinforce professional standards and identify patterns of behaviour that may require further action. Low-level concerns may include conduct that:

- is inconsistent with the Trust's staff code of conduct;
- falls below the standards of behaviour expected of adults working with children;
- appears unprofessional, inappropriate or could be misinterpreted; or
- may indicate changing safeguarding risks or a pattern of behaviour requiring further consideration.

All low-level concerns should:

- be shared promptly with the DSL or headteacher (or other appropriate senior leader in accordance with this policy);
- be recorded appropriately and managed proportionately in accordance with statutory guidance and Trust procedures; and
- be reviewed to identify patterns, repeated behaviours or other matters requiring further action.

Each school's DSL will maintain a confidential log of reported low-level concerns. This log will be shared with and reviewed regularly with the headteacher to identify any emerging patterns, themes or behaviours that may indicate an increased safeguarding risk or require further management. Appropriate action will be taken where concerns demonstrate a pattern of behaviour or otherwise indicate that an individual's conduct should be addressed.

10.4 Whistleblowing

All staff have a duty to report safeguarding concerns. The Trust will ensure staff can raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Staff who believe safeguarding concerns are not being appropriately addressed should escalate concerns through the Trust's whistleblowing policy or directly to relevant safeguarding agencies where appropriate.

11. Children at increased risk of harm

11.1 Introduction

Every child has the right to feel safe, be protected from harm and receive the support they need to achieve positive outcomes. Whilst any child can experience abuse, neglect or exploitation, some children may experience additional vulnerabilities or face barriers to recognising, disclosing or reporting concerns.

The Trust recognises that vulnerability is rarely determined by one factor alone. Children's experiences, identities, family circumstances, health, relationships and wider environments often interact to increase or reduce risk. Staff should therefore avoid assumptions or stereotypes and instead consider each child's individual circumstances through a child-centred, strengths-based and professionally curious approach.

Whilst every child has an equal right to protection, some children may face additional barriers to recognising abuse, seeking help or being heard. Further guidance regarding children who may require additional safeguarding support is provided in **Appendix 6**.

11.2 Children who may require additional safeguarding support

Particular consideration should be given to children who:

- have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND);
- have speech, language or communication needs;
- have mental health needs or emotional wellbeing concerns;
- are young carers;
- are looked after or previously looked after;
- are privately fostered;
- are children in need or have a social worker;
- have experienced abuse, neglect or trauma;
- are absent from education or at risk of becoming children missing education;
- have experienced multiple suspensions or are at risk of permanent exclusion;
- attend alternative provision;
- are at risk of criminal exploitation;
- are at risk of sexual exploitation;
- are vulnerable to county lines;
- misuse drugs or alcohol;
- are living with adults experiencing substance misuse, domestic abuse or mental ill-health;
- are affected by parental imprisonment;
- are vulnerable to radicalisation;
- are at risk of forced marriage;
- are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM);
- are asylum seekers or refugees;
- experience housing insecurity or homelessness;
- may be living in informal or unregulated caring arrangements that increase their vulnerability or reduce their visibility to services;
- are pregnant or are young parents;
- identify as LGBTQ+, or are perceived by others to be LGBTQ+, recognising that this does not in itself constitute a safeguarding risk but that some children may experience additional vulnerability to bullying, harassment or discrimination; and
- experience online abuse or exploitation.

This list is not exhaustive. The Trust recognises that safeguarding is continually evolving and that children may experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities which can increase their risk of harm or create additional barriers to accessing support. Safeguarding arrangements, training and guidance will therefore be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective, responsive to emerging risks and aligned with current statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures and best practice.

11.3 Children who may be questioning their gender

The Trust recognises that some children may question their gender and that they may require sensitive, individualised support. The Trust's overarching commitment to child-centred safeguarding applies equally

to these children. Regardless of changes to guidance or wider public debate, staff across the Trust will always place the welfare, safety and best interests of the child at the centre of its decision-making. Each child will be supported on an individual basis, recognising that no two situations are the same and that decisions should never be based on assumptions or blanket approaches. Where a child is questioning their gender, schools will respond in accordance with current statutory guidance and the Trust's safeguarding responsibilities. The designated safeguarding lead should be involved at an early stage where safeguarding considerations arise, ensuring that decisions are informed by professional judgement, the individual circumstances of the child, the views of the child and, where appropriate, parents/carers and relevant agencies. Decisions should be kept under regular review to ensure that support continues to reflect the child's needs and best interests.

11.4 Professional curiosity

Children do not always recognise that they are being harmed or feel able to tell others about their experiences. Some children may:

- minimise abuse;
- normalise harmful behaviour;
- fear the consequences of speaking out;
- feel loyalty towards those causing harm;
- worry about getting others into trouble;
- lack the vocabulary to explain their experiences; or
- communicate distress through behaviour rather than words.

Staff should therefore exercise professional curiosity, recognising that safeguarding concerns often emerge gradually rather than through a single disclosure or incident. The absence of a disclosure should never be interpreted as evidence that a child is safe.

11.5 The child's lived experience

Effective safeguarding requires professionals to understand what life is like from the child's perspective. Safeguarding assessments should seek to understand:

- what life is like for the child;
- how the child experiences home, school and their wider community;
- the child's relationships and support networks;
- protective factors and strengths;
- the risks and challenges they experience; and
- their wishes, feelings and lived experiences.

The child's wishes and feelings should be sought wherever appropriate and given due weight in safeguarding decision-making, in accordance with their age, understanding and circumstances.

12. Contextual safeguarding

12.1 Overview

The Trust recognises that safeguarding concerns frequently arise beyond the family home. Contextual safeguarding involves understanding the wider environments in which children live, learn and socialise and considering how these environments may influence risk. Safeguarding assessments should therefore consider both family circumstances and extra-familial influences.

12.2 Extra-familial harm

Children may experience harm outside the family environment through their relationships, peer groups and the places and spaces in which they spend time. Extra-familial harm may occur in person, online or through a combination of both, and can involve exploitation, abuse, coercion or violence. Sources of extra-familial harm may include:

- peer relationships;
- neighbourhoods;
- transport networks;
- online communities;

- social media;
- organised criminal groups; and
- exploitative or abusive relationships.

Where concerns about extra-familial harm arise, safeguarding assessments should consider the wider context in which the child is living, learning and socialising. The Trust will work collaboratively with safeguarding partners, families and other agencies to identify, assess and reduce these risks wherever possible.

12.3 Places and spaces

Safeguarding leaders should consider whether particular environments or contexts increase the likelihood of harm to children. These may include:

- locations within the local community
- journeys to and from school
- transport hubs
- community spaces
- online platforms
- school routines
- social situations
- other places where children spend time

Understanding where and when children may be at greater risk enables schools to implement proportionate safeguarding measures, adapt supervision where appropriate and contribute to wider multi-agency planning. Safeguarding planning should seek to reduce identified risks while supporting children to access education and wider opportunities safely.

12.4 Mental health and wellbeing

The Trust recognises that mental health and safeguarding are closely connected. Mental ill-health does not in itself indicate abuse. However:

- abuse may contribute to poor mental health; and
- poor mental health may increase vulnerability;
- safeguarding concerns may present initially as changes in emotional wellbeing.

Staff should therefore remain alert to changes in behaviour, attendance, relationships, self-care, emotional regulation or presentation. Where concerns arise, schools should work collaboratively with:

- families
- health professionals
- children's social care
- Family Help
- mental health services

The Trust recognises that self-harm is often an indication that a child is experiencing significant emotional distress and should always be taken seriously. Whilst self-harm is not, in itself, evidence of abuse, it may indicate that a child requires safeguarding support, early intervention or specialist mental health services. All incidents or disclosures of self-harm should be shared with the designated safeguarding lead and responded to in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

13. Attendance, absence and children missing education

13.1 Attendance as a safeguarding issue

The Trust recognises that regular school attendance is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Attendance is often an important indicator of a child's safety, wellbeing and wider circumstances. Changes in attendance may indicate:

- abuse
- neglect
- exploitation
- mental health concerns
- family difficulties

- unmet additional needs
- other safeguarding concerns

Schools will have due regard to the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Working together to improve school attendance' and will adopt a whole-school approach to promoting good attendance, identifying emerging concerns and providing support at the earliest opportunity. Attendance information should always be considered alongside other safeguarding information when assessing a child's needs or level of risk.

13.2 Persistent absence

The Trust expects schools to identify and respond promptly to:

- patterns of absence
- persistent absence
- repeated absence
- partial attendance
- unexplained absence
- attendance concerns affecting vulnerable students
- wider attendance trends

Attendance should not be considered in isolation from safeguarding. Schools should seek to understand the underlying causes of absence and work collaboratively with children, families and partner agencies to address barriers to attendance wherever possible. The Trust expects that each school's DSL and the senior leader responsible for attendance should meet regularly to review attendance information, identify children whose attendance may indicate safeguarding concerns and agree appropriate actions. This collaborative approach supports the early identification of risk, co-ordinated intervention and effective safeguarding oversight.

13.3 Children missing education

The Trust will fulfil its statutory responsibilities relating to children missing education in accordance with current legislation and statutory guidance. When a child leaves school unexpectedly, or their whereabouts become unknown, the DSL should consider whether safeguarding concerns exist and ensure that appropriate enquiries and referrals are made without delay. Schools will work collaboratively with:

- local authorities
- receiving schools
- safeguarding partners
- other relevant agencies

to ensure that children are located promptly, safeguarding information is shared securely and transitions between educational settings do not compromise children's safety or wellbeing.

14. Online safety

14.1 Overview

Online safety is an integral part of safeguarding and child protection. Whilst technology provides significant opportunities to support learning, communication and creativity, it also presents risks that may affect children both online and offline. The Trust recognises that many safeguarding concerns, including child-on-child abuse, exploitation, bullying, grooming, harmful sexual behaviour and abuse involving images or videos, may involve technology either wholly or in part. The Trust therefore adopts a whole-school approach to online safety, recognising that technology-facilitated abuse should always be considered within the wider safeguarding context rather than as a separate issue. Safeguarding arrangements will continue to evolve in response to emerging technologies, changing patterns of children's online activity and developments in statutory guidance. Additional practical guidance relating to online safety, technology-facilitated abuse and emerging technologies is provided in **Appendix 7**.

14.2 Whole-school approach

Schools will adopt a whole-school approach to online safety that reflects the expectations set out in 'Keeping children safe in education'. This will include:

- providing age-appropriate online safety education through the curriculum;
- promoting responsible, respectful and safe use of technology;
- supporting children to recognise, respond to and report online risks, and ensuring they know how to seek help;
- ensuring staff receive appropriate online safety training and safeguarding updates;
- supporting parents and carers to understand emerging online risks;
- maintaining appropriate filtering and monitoring arrangements;
- regularly reviewing emerging technologies and associated safeguarding risks; and
- ensuring that online safety is embedded within wider safeguarding, behaviour and pastoral arrangements.

Online safety should be regarded as a shared responsibility involving trustees, governors, leaders, staff, children and parents/carers. Through this whole-school approach, the Trust seeks to ensure that children are equipped to use technology safely, confidently and responsibly, and know that any online safeguarding concerns will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

14.3 Filtering and monitoring

The Trust will ensure that all schools maintain effective filtering and monitoring systems in accordance with statutory guidance. The board of trustees, local governing bodies and school leaders will seek assurance that filtering and monitoring arrangements are:

- appropriate to the age and needs of students;
- effective in reducing safeguarding risks;
- proportionate to the school's context;
- regularly reviewed; and
- supported by clear governance and oversight.

Each school's DSL and/or members of the wider safeguarding team will work alongside technical colleagues and senior leaders to ensure that safeguarding considerations inform their school's filtering and monitoring arrangements, that concerns identified through monitoring are responded to appropriately and that systems remain effective as technologies and risks evolve.

14.4 Parent partnership

Parents/carers play a vital role in helping children use technology safely and responsibly. Schools will work in partnership with families by:

- sharing online safety information and guidance;
- promoting safe and responsible use of technology at home;
- raising awareness of emerging online risks and trends;
- signposting parents and carers to appropriate sources of advice and support; and
- encouraging open conversations between children and trusted adults about their online experiences.

Schools recognise that effective online safeguarding is strengthened through positive partnerships between children, families and school staff.

15. Safeguarding through the curriculum

15.1 Overview

The Trust recognises that an effective safeguarding curriculum plays a vital role in helping children to stay safe, make informed decisions, build positive relationships and know when and how to seek help. Safeguarding education empowers children with the knowledge, skills and confidence to recognise risks, understand their rights and responsibilities, and respond appropriately to situations that may place them or others at risk of harm. Schools will ensure that safeguarding education enables students to:

- recognise abuse, neglect, exploitation and harmful behaviours;
- develop healthy, respectful and positive relationships;
- understand consent, boundaries and personal safety;
- recognise discrimination, prejudice and bullying;
- understand how to stay safe online and use technology responsibly;

- develop resilience, critical thinking and informed decision-making;
- recognise trusted adults and know how to seek help for themselves or others; and
- understand that safeguarding concerns will always be taken seriously.

Safeguarding education will be delivered primarily through each school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum. Schools will also reinforce safeguarding messages through other aspects of school life, including assemblies, tutor or form time, themed or drop-down days, pastoral programmes, enrichment activities, visiting speakers and other appropriate curriculum opportunities. Safeguarding education should be:

- age appropriate
- inclusive
- responsive to the needs of students
- informed by local safeguarding priorities and emerging risks
- regularly reviewed
- delivered in a way that encourages children to speak openly, ask questions and seek support where needed.

15.2 External speakers, visitors and educational visits

The Trust recognises that external speakers, visitors and educational visits can make a valuable contribution to children's education by broadening their experiences, supporting curriculum delivery and exposing them to a range of appropriate perspectives. Where schools invite external speakers onto school premises, or arrange visits during which children may hear from external speakers, they will take reasonable and proportionate steps to satisfy themselves that those individuals and organisations are suitable and that the content delivered is appropriate for the age, maturity and needs of the audience.
In making these decisions, schools will consider:

- the purpose and educational value of the event;
- the suitability and reputation of the individual or organisation;
- whether the content is consistent with the school's safeguarding responsibilities, values and ethos;
- whether any safeguarding, reputational or security risks have been identified;
- the safeguarding arrangements required for the event, including appropriate staff oversight, supervision and any pre-engagement safeguarding checks; and
- whether the event complies with the Trust's Prevent duty, duties relating to political impartiality and the promotion of fundamental British values.

Schools will not permit speakers or organisations to use Trust premises or school activities to promote extremist, radicalising, discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate views, nor to expose children to content that may place their welfare at risk. Where concerns arise regarding the suitability of an external speaker or organisation, schools will undertake appropriate due diligence and seek advice from relevant agencies, including the local authority or police Prevent team where appropriate. Decisions will always be proportionate, evidence-informed and centred on safeguarding children. Schools are expected to maintain local procedures for the approval and management of external speakers, visitors and organisations using school premises, ensuring that safeguarding considerations form part of educational visits, lettings arrangements and wider risk assessment processes. Any safeguarding checks required for visitors, volunteers, contractors, external speakers or other adults working with children will be completed in accordance with current statutory guidance and the Trust's safer recruitment policy. Schools will not rely solely on supervision where statutory safeguarding checks are required.

16. Safer recruitment

16.1 Commitment

The Trust is committed to recruiting, selecting and retaining staff who are suitable to work with children. The Trust recognises that safer recruitment forms an essential element of safeguarding and contributes to creating a culture in which children are protected from harm.

16.2 Principles

The Trust will ensure that all recruitment processes are in line with the Trust's safer recruitment policy which has the purpose of:

- deterring unsuitable applicants;
- identifying and rejecting unsuitable candidates;
- complying with statutory guidance and employment legislation;
- promoting safeguarding throughout recruitment;
- exploring candidates' attitudes towards safeguarding children;
- verifying identity, qualifications and employment history;
- undertaking all required pre-employment checks.

The Trust will maintain an accurate single central record (SCR) of pre-employment checks. More details can be found in the Trust's SCR guidance document.

16.3 Recruitment responsibilities

Headteachers, recruiting managers and governors involved in recruitment will ensure that:

- safeguarding remains central throughout recruitment;
- interview processes assess safeguarding values and professional conduct;
- safeguarding concerns arising during recruitment are explored appropriately and thoroughly;
- required checks are completed before employment commences; and
- concerns arising after appointment are managed promptly.

16.4 Ongoing safeguarding

Safeguarding does not end once recruitment has been completed. The Trust will promote ongoing safeguarding through:

- induction;
- line management;
- professional development;
- low-level concern reporting;
- annual training and the application of the staff code of conduct; and
- quality assurance activities, such as termly school visits by safeguarding link governors.

Further operational guidance relating to safer recruitment is contained within the Trust's safer recruitment policy.

16.5 Staff training

The Trust is committed to ensuring that safeguarding training develops professional confidence rather than simply fulfilling statutory requirements. All staff will receive:

- safeguarding induction
- child protection training
- online safety training
- regular safeguarding updates
- annual safeguarding refresher training

Training will be:

- evidence-informed;
- responsive to emerging safeguarding risks;
- proportionate to role; and
- evaluated for impact.

Additional training will be provided where staff undertake specialist safeguarding responsibilities. DSLs, deputy DSLs, governors and trustees will receive role-specific safeguarding training in accordance with statutory guidance. The Trust's wider safeguarding professional development programme is described within the safeguarding handbook.

17. Alternative provision

The Trust recognises that responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children remains with the school, even where education is provided elsewhere. This includes alternative provision placements, reduced timetables, flexi-schooling arrangements and any planned off-site education directed to meet a child's safeguarding, welfare or individual needs, including where temporary safeguarding separation is required. Decisions relating to alternative provision, reduced timetables, flexi-schooling and off-site safeguarding arrangements will be made in accordance with the Trust's internal protocol, ensuring that the child's safety, welfare and educational needs remain central to all decision-making. Wherever off-site provision is considered for safeguarding reasons, the school will ensure that the arrangement is necessary, proportionate, regularly reviewed and supported by an appropriate risk assessment and safeguarding plan. Before any placement or arrangement is agreed, the school will undertake a comprehensive suitability assessment. This will include consideration of the provider's safeguarding arrangements, health and safety, staff suitability, attendance and communication procedures, and any other factors relevant to the child's individual needs and identified risks. The assessment process will establish clear lines of communication between the school and the provider, ensuring that safeguarding information can be shared promptly and that concerns are escalated without delay. Schools will:

- complete a suitability assessment before any placement or off-site arrangement begins;
- satisfy themselves that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place;
- ensure that any off-site safeguarding arrangement is supported by a clear rationale, appropriate risk assessment, agreed safeguarding measures and regular review;
- maintain regular communication with the provider;
- monitor attendance, engagement and welfare;
- ensure children continue to receive appropriate educational and pastoral support;
- review placements and off-site arrangements regularly to ensure they continue to meet the child's needs; and
- respond promptly where safeguarding concerns arise or where a placement or arrangement is no longer considered suitable.

Each school will maintain an up-to-date register of students accessing alternative provision, reduced timetables, flexi-schooling arrangements or other planned off-site education. This will support ongoing safeguarding oversight and will be reviewed regularly by the school's safeguarding link governor as part of the Trust's safeguarding assurance and governance arrangements.

18. Elective home education

The Trust recognises that parents have the right to educate their children at home where this is consistent with the law. Where a parent/carer chooses to electively home educate their child, schools will fulfil their statutory responsibilities in accordance with current legislation, the Department for Education's guidance on elective home education and any relevant local authority procedures. Where safeguarding concerns exist, schools will continue to work collaboratively with the local authority and other relevant agencies, sharing information appropriately to support the safety and welfare of the child. Elective home education should never be viewed as bringing safeguarding responsibilities to an end or preventing appropriate safeguarding action where concerns remain. Where a child is receiving support through Family Help, children's social care or other safeguarding processes, the DSL should ensure that relevant agencies are informed of the proposed change and that safeguarding information is shared promptly and securely in accordance with statutory guidance.

19. Use of school premises

The Trust recognises that safeguarding responsibilities extend beyond the normal school day and apply whenever school premises are used by external organisations to provide activities or services involving children. Schools will ensure that arrangements for the use of school premises are consistent with ‘Keeping children safe in education’, local school lettings procedures, any Trust expectations relating to the use of school premises, as well as any other relevant statutory guidance. Before granting permission for school premises to be used, schools should seek appropriate assurance that:

- suitable safeguarding and child protection arrangements are in place;

- adults have undergone the appropriate pre-appointment checks where required;
- clear procedures exist for reporting safeguarding concerns;
- children will be appropriately supervised and protected throughout the activity; and
- appropriate insurance, health, safety and welfare, and risk management arrangements are in place.

Where safeguarding arrangements are considered inadequate, or where concerns arise about an organisation's ability to safeguard children, permission to use school premises may be refused or withdrawn.

20. Children staying with host families

Where children stay with host families as part of educational visits, exchange programmes or other educational activities, schools will ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place in accordance with 'Keeping children safe in education', relevant Department for Education guidance and local authority procedures where applicable. Risk assessments and planning arrangements should consider:

- safeguarding arrangements;
- the suitability of host families, where required by statutory guidance;
- appropriate supervision;
- communication arrangements;
- welfare and medical needs;
- emergency procedures; and
- the suitability of accommodation.

Schools will ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken where these are required by statutory guidance and that children, parents and staff understand how safeguarding concerns can be raised and responded to throughout the visit.

21. Monitoring and quality assurance

21.1 Safeguarding assurance

The Trust recognises that safeguarding quality assurance is a continuous process rather than an annual event. Effective safeguarding requires ongoing evaluation of both statutory compliance and the impact of safeguarding practice on children. Safeguarding effectiveness is therefore evaluated through a range of complementary activities, including:

- safeguarding supervision
- safeguarding visits
- safeguarding audits
- governance monitoring
- safeguarding action planning
- safeguarding data analysis
- professional learning
- policy review
- staff, parent and student voice

The Trust is committed to maintaining a strong safeguarding culture through continual reflection, professional curiosity, evidence-informed assurance and shared responsibility. The Trust's expectations for safeguarding culture and professional practice are summarised in **Appendix 8**, whilst operational procedures, quality assurance activities and governance arrangements are detailed within the Trust's safeguarding handbook. Throughout these activities, safeguarding leaders, governors and trustees should continually ask:

- *Are statutory safeguarding responsibilities being fulfilled?*
- *How do we know safeguarding arrangements are effective?*
- *What could we do even better?*

21.2 Evidence-informed assurance

The Trust seeks assurance through evidence rather than reassurance. No single source of information provides assurance in isolation. Safeguarding leaders and governors should therefore triangulate information from a range of qualitative and quantitative sources to evaluate safeguarding practice, identify emerging themes and determine whether safeguarding arrangements are effective and improving outcomes for children. Evidence may include:

- safeguarding records
- safeguarding themes
- attendance
- behaviour
- exclusions and suspensions
- children missing education
- alternative provision monitoring
- CPOMS analysis
- safeguarding reviews
- quality assurance reports
- safeguarding action plans
- external inspection findings

Evidence should always be considered collectively and within the context of each school's individual circumstances.

21.3 Continuous improvement

Safeguarding quality assurance should identify:

- strengths;
- areas for development;
- emerging safeguarding risks;
- examples of effective practice; and
- opportunities for Trust-wide learning.

Schools should use this learning to inform safeguarding action planning, professional development and school improvement. Examples of effective practice should be shared across the Trust to strengthen safeguarding arrangements in every school. Further operational guidance is contained within the Trust's safeguarding handbook.

22. The Trust's commitment

22.1 A culture of safeguarding

Safeguarding is fundamental to the Trust's vision of providing outstanding, inclusive education in which every child feels safe, valued, respected and able to flourish. Effective safeguarding depends not on policies alone but upon the daily actions, professional judgement and collective commitment of everyone working within the Trust. Every school within the Trust shares a commitment to creating environments in which safeguarding is embedded within leadership, governance, teaching, pastoral care and every aspect of school life. Through strong relationships, professional curiosity, evidence-informed decision-making and effective partnership working, schools seek to identify concerns early, provide timely support and ensure that every child receives the right help at the right time. Safeguarding practice will continue to evolve through learning from quality assurance, research, statutory guidance and the voices of children, families and staff. Safeguarding arrangements will continue to develop in response to emerging risks, changes in society and developments in technology, ensuring that they remain effective, proportionate and centred on children's lived experiences. The Trust will promote an inclusive, anti-discriminatory culture in which racism, faith-based prejudice and other forms of discriminatory behaviour are recognised, challenged and addressed as part of its safeguarding responsibilities. Schools will ensure that safeguarding systems, policies, curriculum provision and day-to-day practice contribute to an environment in which every child feels safe, respected and able to seek help. The Trust's safeguarding culture is characterised by:

- child-centred practice
- professional curiosity

- respectful challenge
- collaborative working
- evidence-informed decision-making
- continuous learning
- continual improvement

Through these principles, the Trust seeks not only to fulfil its statutory responsibilities but to create schools in which every child is listened to, protected, supported and empowered to achieve their full potential.

22.2 Policy review

This policy will be reviewed:

- annually;
- following significant changes to legislation;
- following publication of revised statutory guidance;
- following safeguarding practice reviews where appropriate; and
- where quality assurance identifies the need for revision.

The Trust safeguarding lead may make minor operational or administrative amendments throughout the year where these do not alter the Trust's safeguarding principles, statutory responsibilities or governance arrangements; these will be approved by the CEO and safeguarding lead trustee, and recorded for trustees. All substantive amendments will be presented to the board of trustees for approval.

Appendices

The appendices form part of this policy and provide practical guidance to support consistent safeguarding practice across the Trust. They should be read alongside the relevant sections of this policy and do not replace statutory guidance or professional judgement. Where there is any conflict between this policy and statutory guidance, the statutory guidance will take precedence. The appendices are intended to support staff in recognising safeguarding concerns, responding appropriately and understanding the Trust's expectations for professional practice.

Appendix 1: Key statutory and professional guidance
This policy should be read alongside the following statutory guidance and national publications:

Statutory guidance, current editions

- 'Keeping children safe in education'
- 'Working together to safeguard children'
- 'Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers'
- Prevent Duty guidance

Legislation

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Education Act 2002
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK GDPR

Department for Education guidance

- Behaviour in Schools
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation
- Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education
- Meeting Digital and Technology Standards in Schools (Filtering and Monitoring)

Trust documentation
This policy should also be read alongside:

- Part B – School-specific safeguarding arrangements
- Trust safeguarding handbook
- Staff code of conduct
- Safer recruitment policy
- Behaviour policy
- Attendance policy
- Whistleblowing policy

Appendix 2: Indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation

Purpose
Recognising abuse is rarely straightforward. Children may not disclose abuse directly and, in many cases, may communicate concerns through changes in behaviour, presentation or emotional wellbeing. Staff should be professionally curious, remain alert to patterns over time and always consider the child's circumstances. The presence of one or more of the indicators below does not necessarily mean that abuse or neglect has occurred. Equally, the absence of obvious indicators should never prevent staff from acting upon a concern. Where staff are worried about a child, they must follow the procedures set out in Section 6 of this policy without delay.

Physical abuse
Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. It may also occur when a parent or carer fabricates or deliberately induces illness. Possible indicators include:

- unexplained injuries or injuries inconsistent with the explanation provided;
- injuries in various stages of healing;
- repeated attendance with similar injuries;
- reluctance to change clothing for PE or swimming;
- flinching or fear of physical contact;
- aggressive behaviour or extreme withdrawal;
- implausible explanations for injuries; and/or
- frequent absence following injury.

Emotional abuse
Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that adversely affects their emotional development, self-esteem and ability to form secure relationships. Possible indicators include:

- excessive fearfulness or anxiety;
- low self-esteem or persistent self-criticism;
- extreme compliance or excessive need to please;
- developmental delay not otherwise explained;
- sudden deterioration in behaviour or attainment;
- self-harm or suicidal thoughts;
- social isolation; and/or
- inappropriate emotional responses.

Sexual abuse
Sexual abuse involves forcing, causing or inciting a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse may occur in person or online and may involve technology-facilitated abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males; women and other children can also commit acts of sexual abuse. Children may be sexually abused within the family, an institution or a community setting and are more likely to know their abuser than not. Children under the age of 13 can never provide valid consent to sexual activity. Possible indicators include:

- sexualised behaviour inappropriate for age;
- sexually explicit language or knowledge;
- reluctance to be with particular individuals;
- sudden behavioural changes;
- unexplained gifts or money;
- pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections;
- self-harm or eating disorders; and/or
- anxiety surrounding technology or social media.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of health or development. Possible indicators include:

- consistently poor hygiene;
- inadequate clothing;
- persistent hunger;
- untreated medical conditions;
- repeated tiredness;
- poor attendance;
- lack of supervision; and/or
- developmental delay.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE)

Children may be manipulated or coerced into criminal activity through grooming, threats, violence, debt bondage or exploitation. Possible indicators include:

- unexplained money or expensive possessions;
- frequent missing episodes;
- association with older individuals or gangs;
- carrying weapons;
- unexplained injuries;
- increased secrecy;
- repeated exclusion or absence; and/or
- involvement in county lines activity.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse. It may involve an exchange where a child receives something, or is promised something, such as gifts, money, affection or status, in return for sexual activity. Children may be exploited even where no exchange is apparent or where they do not recognise themselves as being exploited. Possible indicators include:

- unexplained gifts
- older partners
- repeated missing episodes
- sexually transmitted infections
- changes in appearance
- emotional distress
- withdrawal from family or friends.

Domestic abuse

Children may experience domestic abuse directly or indirectly through seeing, hearing or living with its effects. Possible indicators include:

- anxiety
- hypervigilance
- poor concentration
- emotional dysregulation
- aggression
- frequent tiredness
- concern for family members.

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

Children may display harmful sexual behaviours towards other children. Possible indicators include:

- unwanted sexual touching
- sexual harassment
- coercive behaviour
- sharing sexual images

- persistent inappropriate sexual language
- sexual violence.

All incidents should be taken seriously and managed in accordance with KCSIE and school procedures.

Online and technology-facilitated abuse

Abuse increasingly occurs through digital technology and may include:

- grooming
- coercion
- cyberbullying
- image-based abuse
- online sexual exploitation
- livestreaming abuse
- AI-generated sexual imagery
- deepfake images or videos
- coercion to create or share nude or semi-nude images.

Possible indicators include:

- sudden secrecy regarding devices
- distress following online activity
- multiple online accounts
- withdrawal from usual friendships
- obsessive online behaviour.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation refers to the process by which someone comes to support terrorism or extremist ideologies. Possible indicators include:

- significant changes in behaviour;
- increasingly intolerant views;
- fixation on extremist material;
- isolation from previous peer groups; and/or
- expressing support for violence.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM is illegal and is a form of child abuse. Possible indicators include:

- prolonged absence overseas;
- difficulty walking or sitting;
- frequent requests to use the toilet;
- reluctance to participate in physical activity; and/or
- disclosure by the child or another individual.

Teachers must make a direct report to the police where, in the course of their professional duties, they discover that an act of female genital mutilation appears to have been carried out on a girl under the age of 18. This duty does not replace the requirement to inform the designated safeguarding lead in accordance with this policy.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage is distinct from arranged marriage and occurs where one or both parties do not consent. Possible indicators include:

- sudden restrictions placed upon the child;
- anxiety about forthcoming travel abroad;
- family surveillance;
- unexplained absence from school; and/or
- disclosure of pressure to marry.

Professional curiosity

Safeguarding concerns often arise from a number of seemingly minor observations rather than a single incident. Staff should:

- remain professionally curious;
- notice patterns over time;
- consider changes in behaviour, attendance or presentation;
- ask respectful questions where appropriate;
- record concerns promptly;
- never assume someone else will act; and/or
- report concerns immediately to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy DSL.

If in doubt, staff should always share their concern. It is never wrong to seek advice where a child's welfare may be at risk.

Appendix 3: Responding to safeguarding concerns and disclosures

Purpose
Every member of staff has a responsibility to act immediately if they have concerns about the welfare of a child. Safeguarding concerns should **never** be investigated by school staff. Their role is to recognise concerns, respond appropriately, record accurately and report promptly.

If a child makes a disclosure...

Listen
- Stay calm.
- Give the child your full attention.
- Allow them to speak freely.
- Accept what they are saying.
- Avoid expressing shock or disbelief.

Reassure
Tell the child:
- they have done the right thing by speaking to you;
- they are being taken seriously;
- help is available;
- you will need to share the information with people who can help keep them safe.

Never promise confidentiality.

Clarify
If necessary:
- ask open questions only;
- avoid leading questions;
- do not investigate;
- do not ask the child to repeat the disclosure unnecessarily.

Your role is to understand enough to pass the concern on safely.

Record
As soon as possible:
- record exactly what was said;
- distinguish clearly between fact, observation and professional opinion;
- use the child's own words wherever possible;
- include dates, times and names;
- sign and date the record.

Report
Report immediately to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) a deputy DSL. If neither is immediately available and there is an immediate risk of harm, staff must contact children's social care or the police directly before informing the DSL.

Remember
DO
✔ Listen carefully and stay calm.
✔ Take the child seriously.
✔ Reassure appropriately.
✔ Record accurately.
✔ Report immediately.
✔ Continue to support the child.

DO NOT
✘ Investigate.
✘ Ask leading questions.
✘ Promise confidentiality.
✘ Delay reporting.
✘ Share information unnecessarily.
✘ Confront alleged perpetrators or attempt to resolve safeguarding concerns yourself.

Immediate risk
Where a child is believed to be in immediate danger of significant harm:
- contact emergency services (999) where appropriate;
- contact children's social care without delay;
- inform the DSL as soon as it is safe to do so;
- remain with the child where appropriate until appropriate support arrives.

Professional judgement
Staff should never be deterred from sharing a concern or making a referral in good faith. If there is any doubt about whether a concern should be shared, it must be discussed with the DSL. It is always better to share a concern that proves unfounded than to fail to act when a child needs protection.

Expectations for safeguarding recording
Safeguarding records are an essential part of protecting children. They may be relied upon by designated safeguarding leads, children's social care, the police, safeguarding partners and, in some cases, during safeguarding practice reviews, serious case reviews, criminal investigations or court proceedings.
High-quality safeguarding records support effective decision-making, demonstrate professional practice and show respect for children, families and colleagues. When recording concerns, staff should:
✔ record concerns as soon as possible after the event or disclosure;
✔ provide a clear, factual and chronological account of what was seen, heard or reported;
✔ distinguish clearly between fact, observation and professional opinion;
✔ use the child's own words wherever possible, recording direct quotations accurately;
✔ record actions taken, decisions made and the reasons for those decisions;
✔ use clear, professional and respectful language, recognising that records may be shared with other agencies and may be read by the child or their family in the future;
✔ record changes in presentation, behaviour or demeanour where these are relevant to the concern; and
✔ ensure records are completed in accordance with the Trust's safeguarding procedures and local recording arrangements.

Staff should not:
✘ delay recording because they are unsure whether a concern is significant;
✘ investigate concerns or attempt to establish proof before making a report;
✘ include assumptions, speculation, rumours or hearsay as fact;
✘ use emotive, judgemental or discriminatory language;
✘ record personal opinions unless these are clearly identified as professional observations and supported by evidence; or
✘ omit relevant information because it appears minor or isolated, recognising that safeguarding concerns are often understood through patterns that emerge over time.
Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse has occurred. If you are concerned, record your concern promptly and share it with the designated safeguarding lead in accordance with this policy.

Staff should always write safeguarding records on the assumption that they may be read by the child, their family, partner agencies or a court. Records should therefore be factual, objective, professional and respectful at all times.

Vanguard Learning Trust

Responding to safeguarding concerns and disclosures

Every member of staff has a responsibility to act immediately if they have concerns about the welfare or a child.

Your role is to listen, reassure, record and report – not to investigate.

IF A CHILD MAKES A DISCLOSURE OR YOU HAVE A CONCERN

1 LISTEN

- Stay calm.
- Give the child your full attention.
- Allow them to speak freely.
- Accept what they are saying.
- Avoid expressing shock or disbelief.

2 REASSURE

- Tell the child they have done the right thing.
- Tell them they are being taken seriously.
- Explain that you will need to share the information with people who can help keep them safe.
- **Never promise confidentiality.**

3 CLARIFY

- If necessary, ask open questions only.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Do not investigate.
- Do not ask the child to repeat the disclosure unnecessarily.

4 RECORD

- As soon as possible, record exactly what was said.
- Use the child's own words.
- Distinguish clearly between fact, obsrevation and professional opinion.
- Include dates, times and names.
- Sign and date the record.

5 REPORT

- Report immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL.
- Do not delay.

6 NEXT ACTION

- The DSL will decide the next steps and, where appropriate, make a referral to Children's Social Care or other agencies.
- Continue to support the child.

DO

- Listen carefully.
- Stay calm.
- Believe the child.
- Reassure appropriately.
- Record accurately and objectively.
- Report immediately.
- Continue to support the child.

DON'T

- Investigate.
- Ask leading questions.
- Promise secrecy.
- Delay reporting.
- Share information unnecessarily.
- Confront alleged perpetrators.
- Attempt to resolve safeguarding concerns yourself.

IMMEDIATE RISK

Where a child is believed to be in immediate danger of significant harm:

1. Contact emergency services (999) where appropriate.
2. Contact Children's Social Care without delay.
3. Inform the DSL as soon as it is safe to do so.
4. Remain with the child where appropriate until appropriate support arrives.

If the DSL or Deputy DSL are not immediately available and you are concerned a child is at immediate risk of harm, contact Children's Social Care or the Police directly before informing the DSL.

KEY REMINDERS

- Act immediately.
- Do not investigate.
- Keep information confidential.
- Record factual information only.
- Seek advice if uncertain.

IF IN DOUBT, SHARE THE CONCERN.
It is never wrong to seek advice where a child's welfare may be at risk.

ASPIRATION | COMMUNITY | EQUITY

Appendix 4: Family Help and safeguarding thresholds

Purpose
The Trust recognises that safeguarding is most effective when concerns are identified early and children and families receive the right support at the right time. Most safeguarding concerns do not begin with child protection. Schools play a vital role in recognising emerging needs, building positive relationships with families and ensuring that appropriate support is accessed before concerns escalate. The following framework provides a broad guide to levels of need. Professional judgement should always be exercised, and advice sought from the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) where appropriate.

Universal support
Children whose needs are met through universal services. Examples may include:

- good attendance
- positive wellbeing
- appropriate educational progress
- stable family circumstances
- no identified safeguarding concerns

School response

- High-quality teaching and pastoral care
- Positive relationships with children and families
- Ongoing monitoring

Family Help
Children with emerging or additional needs. Examples may include:

- declining attendance;
- emotional wellbeing concerns;
- friendship difficulties;
- emerging behavioural concerns;
- low-level parental conflict;
- housing or financial difficulties;
- parental illness;
- caring responsibilities;
- low-level safeguarding concerns.

School response

- Discuss concerns with the DSL
- Work collaboratively with parents and carers where appropriate
- Consider Family Help assessment or referral
- Review progress regularly

Children in Need (Section 17 Children Act 1989)
Children requiring co-ordinated statutory support. Examples may include:

- significant family difficulties;
- persistent neglect;
- escalating mental health concerns;
- disability requiring co-ordinated support;
- repeated safeguarding concerns;
- complex family circumstances.

School response

- Work closely with children's social care
- Attend planning meetings
- Share information appropriately
- Continue to provide pastoral support

Child Protection (Section 47 Children Act 1989)
Children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. Examples may include:

- physical abuse;
- sexual abuse;
- severe emotional abuse;
- serious neglect;
- child exploitation;
- immediate safety concerns.

School response

- Report immediately to the DSL
- Children's social care referral without delay
- Police involvement where appropriate
- Ongoing multi-agency working

Professional curiosity
Thresholds are not always clear. Staff should remain professionally curious where:

- concerns appear to be increasing;
- patterns begin to emerge;
- there are repeated low-level concerns;
- the child's presentation changes significantly;
- family circumstances deteriorate.

Small concerns, when viewed collectively, may indicate a child requires additional support.

Working with families
Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, schools will seek to work collaboratively with parents and carers. Positive relationships with families often lead to earlier support and better outcomes for children. However, where there is reason to believe informing parents may place a child at increased risk of harm, advice should be sought from the DSL and children's social care before contact is made.

Key principles
The Trust is committed to ensuring that:

- support is provided as early as possible;
- children receive the right help at the right time;
- safeguarding decisions remain child-centred;
- agencies work together effectively; and/or
- families are treated with dignity and respect.

Appendix 5: Concerns about adults working with children

Purpose
Children have the right to be cared for by adults who are safe, suitable and act professionally at all times. The Trust is committed to creating a culture of openness, accountability and professional challenge in which concerns about adults are identified early, reported promptly and managed fairly, consistently and proportionately. All concerns must be taken seriously. Prompt reporting protects children, supports staff and maintains public confidence in safeguarding arrangements.

Allegations that may meet the harm threshold
An allegation may meet the harm threshold where an adult has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Where these criteria may be met, the concern must be reported immediately to the headteacher (or chair of governors/trustees where appropriate). The local authority designated officer (LADO) will be consulted in accordance with statutory guidance.

Low-level concerns
A low-level concern is behaviour which is inconsistent with the Trust's staff code of conduct but does not meet the harm threshold. Examples may include:

- over-familiar behaviour;
- inappropriate boundaries;
- use of personal devices contrary to policy;
- inappropriate language or humour;
- one-off incidents of poor professional judgement.

Whilst individually minor, repeated low-level concerns may indicate a developing pattern of behaviour and must therefore be recorded and reviewed.

Whistleblowing
All staff have a professional responsibility to raise concerns where they believe:

- safeguarding procedures are not being followed;
- children are not adequately protected;
- adults are behaving inappropriately;
- safeguarding practice falls below expected standards.

Staff should feel confident that genuine concerns raised in good faith will be taken seriously and managed fairly.

Professional challenge
Effective safeguarding depends upon constructive professional challenge. Staff should respectfully question decisions where they believe:

- a child remains at risk;
- appropriate action has not been taken;
- information has not been appropriately shared;
- safeguarding procedures have not been followed.

Professional challenge should always remain respectful, evidence-informed and focused upon the child's welfare.

Summary of reporting routes and mandatory duties

Concern	Report to
Concern about a child	DSL or deputy DSL
Allegation meeting the harm threshold	Headteacher (or chair of governors/trustees where appropriate)
Low-level concern	DSL, deputy DSL or headteacher
Concern about the headteacher	CEO and chair of governors
Concern about the CEO	Chair of trustees
Immediate danger	Police (999) and children's social care
Known case of FGM (teachers only – mandatory reporting duty)	Police (101 or 999 if there is immediate risk) and DSL or deputy DSL
Mandatory report of child sexual abuse (where the statutory duty applies)	Police or local authority (in accordance with the statutory duty) and inform the DSL or deputy DSL in line with this policy.

***Note**: Mandatory reporting duties apply only in the specific circumstances prescribed by legislation. Staff should continue to report all safeguarding concerns immediately to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy DSL in accordance with this policy. Where there is an immediate risk of harm, the police and/or children's social care should be contacted without delay.*

Remember

- Act immediately
- Do not investigate
- Keep information confidential
- Record factual information only
- Seek advice if uncertain

Safeguarding concerns should always be reported, even where there is uncertainty.

Appendix 6: Children who may be at increased risk of harm

Purpose
All children have an equal right to protection. However, some children may face additional barriers to recognising abuse, seeking help or being heard. These barriers may increase their vulnerability and require staff to exercise additional professional curiosity, sensitivity and support. This appendix highlights groups of children who may require additional safeguarding consideration. It should not be regarded as an exhaustive list, and staff should always consider each child's individual circumstances rather than making assumptions based upon personal characteristics or family background.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
Children with SEND may be at greater risk of abuse and neglect because they may:

- have communication difficulties;
- rely upon others for personal care;
- experience social isolation;
- have additional behavioural or emotional needs; and/or
- find it more difficult to recognise or report abuse.

Staff should remain alert to changes in behaviour, presentation or emotional wellbeing and ensure that safeguarding responses are adapted to meet individual communication needs.

Children requiring mental health support
Mental health concerns may be an indicator that a child has experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation, or may increase their vulnerability to harm. Staff should be alert to:

- persistent anxiety
- low mood
- self-harm
- suicidal ideation
- significant changes in behaviour
- withdrawal from peers
- eating difficulties

Mental health concerns should always be considered within the wider safeguarding context.

Children missing education
Poor attendance, persistent absence and children missing education can be indicators of abuse, neglect, exploitation, forced marriage, child criminal exploitation or child sexual exploitation. Schools should monitor attendance carefully and respond promptly to emerging concerns.

Looked after and previously looked after children
Children who are looked after or previously looked after may have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect or disrupted attachments. Schools should work closely with Virtual School Heads and other professionals to ensure these children receive appropriate educational and safeguarding support.

Children living in adverse family circumstances
Some children may experience increased vulnerability because of family circumstances including:

- domestic abuse;
- parental mental ill health;
- substance misuse;
- parental offending;
- homelessness;
- housing instability;
- financial hardship.

Staff should recognise that cumulative experiences may significantly affect children's wellbeing.

Young carers
Young carers may undertake caring responsibilities that affect their education, attendance, wellbeing or emotional development. Schools should identify young carers early and ensure appropriate support is available.

Children at risk of exploitation
Children may be vulnerable to:

- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- county lines
- serious violence
- trafficking
- modern slavery

Exploitation often involves grooming, coercion, intimidation, violence or debt bondage and may not always be recognised by the child themselves.

Children experiencing harm outside the home
Abuse may occur beyond the family environment. This may include:

- peer groups
- public spaces
- transport
- parks
- shopping centres
- online environments
- social media

Staff should consider whether wider environmental factors are contributing to safeguarding concerns.

Children at risk from technology
Technology can increase children's exposure to abuse through:

- online grooming
- cyberbullying
- image-based abuse
- AI-generated imagery
- coercive control
- online fraud
- extremist material
- harmful online communities

Staff should understand that online abuse may have significant offline consequences.

Children who identify as LGBTQ+
The Trust recognises that children who identify as LGBTQ+ may experience bullying, discrimination or prejudice. Being LGBTQ+ is **not** itself a safeguarding concern. However, staff should recognise that discrimination, rejection or social isolation may increase vulnerability and should ensure all children feel safe, respected and included.

Children with family members in prison
Children may experience emotional distress, stigma, disrupted relationships and practical difficulties where a parent or close family member is imprisoned. Appropriate pastoral and safeguarding support should be provided.

Children who are privately fostered or living in informal care arrangements
Staff should remain alert to children living away from their parents and ensure appropriate notifications are made where private fostering arrangements exist.

Professional curiosity

No list can identify every child who may require support. Staff should always:

- know the child;
- understand life from the child's perspective;
- recognise patterns rather than isolated incidents;
- remain professionally curious;
- seek advice whenever uncertain;
- share concerns promptly.

Children rarely fit neatly into categories. Effective safeguarding relies upon understanding the whole child, their relationships and the wider context of their lives.

Appendix 7: Online safety and emerging technologies

Purpose
Online safety is an integral part of safeguarding. Children increasingly live, learn and socialise in digital environments, meaning that many safeguarding risks occur both online and offline. The Trust recognises that technology continues to evolve rapidly. Safeguarding practice must therefore remain responsive to emerging risks whilst enabling children to benefit safely from digital technologies.

Key principles
The Trust will:
- promote safe, responsible and respectful use of technology;
- educate children about online risks through the curriculum;
- maintain effective filtering and monitoring systems;
- work in partnership with parents and carers;
- review emerging technologies regularly;
- respond promptly to online safeguarding concerns.

Technology-facilitated abuse
Online abuse may include:
- online grooming
- cyberbullying
- coercive or controlling behaviour
- image-based abuse
- online sexual exploitation
- sharing of nude or semi-nude images
- online harassment
- financial exploitation
- extremist content
- hate-based abuse

Online abuse should always be treated with the same seriousness as abuse occurring offline.

Artificial intelligence (AI)
Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly accessible and presents both educational opportunities and safeguarding risks. Potential safeguarding risks include:
- AI-generated sexual images ('deepfakes')
- manipulated images or videos
- impersonation
- misinformation
- online fraud
- inappropriate AI chatbot interaction;
- generation of harmful or illegal content

Staff should remain alert to the ways in which AI may be used to facilitate abuse, bullying or exploitation.

Filtering and monitoring
The Trust will maintain age-appropriate filtering and monitoring systems designed to:
- reduce exposure to harmful content;
- identify safeguarding concerns;
- support appropriate online behaviour; and
- comply with statutory expectations.

Filtering and monitoring systems complement, but do not replace, active supervision and professional judgement.

Education

Students will be taught how to:

- stay safe online;
- recognise grooming and exploitation;
- protect personal information;
- manage online relationships respectfully;
- report concerns;
- critically evaluate online content; and
- understand the opportunities and limitations of AI.

Working with parents and carers

The Trust values the important role of parents and carers in promoting online safety. Schools will provide information, guidance and opportunities to help families:

- understand emerging online risks;
- support safe technology use at home;
- recognise signs of online harm; and
- work collaboratively with the school where concerns arise.

Staff responsibilities

All staff should:

- model safe and professional use of technology;
- understand the Trust's acceptable use expectations;
- report online safeguarding concerns promptly;
- remain informed about emerging technologies; and
- participate in regular safeguarding training.

Key message

Technology continues to evolve, but the principles of safeguarding remain unchanged. Children should know that they can speak to a trusted adult whenever something online makes them feel worried, unsafe or uncomfortable.

Appendix 8: Safeguarding culture and professional practice

Purpose
Effective safeguarding depends not only upon robust systems and procedures, but upon the culture, values and professional behaviours demonstrated every day by those working with children. The Trust is committed to fostering a safeguarding culture in which every member of staff understands their responsibilities, remains professionally curious and places the welfare of children at the centre of every decision.

Our expectations
Everyone working within the Trust is expected to:

- place the child's welfare above all other considerations;
- act immediately where concerns arise;
- remain professionally curious and avoid making assumptions;
- listen carefully to children and take their views seriously;
- record concerns accurately and objectively;
- share information appropriately and without unnecessary delay;
- seek advice whenever uncertain;
- work collaboratively with colleagues and partner agencies;
- maintain professional boundaries at all times; and
- contribute positively to a culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Professional curiosity
Professional curiosity means being willing to:

- notice when something changes;
- recognise patterns rather than isolated incidents;
- ask respectful questions;
- consider the child's circumstances;
- explore concerns rather than dismiss them; and
- challenge assumptions appropriately.

Professional curiosity helps ensure that children who need support are identified at the earliest possible opportunity.

Professional challenge
Staff should feel confident to challenge decisions respectfully where they believe:

- safeguarding concerns have not been fully explored;
- a child remains at risk;
- information has not been appropriately shared; and
- agreed safeguarding procedures have not been followed.

Professional challenge should always remain constructive, evidence-informed and focused upon improving outcomes for children.

Reflective practice
The Trust encourages reflective practice at all levels. Reflection enables staff to:

- learn from experience;
- recognise emerging risks;
- improve professional judgement;
- strengthen safeguarding practice; and
- continually develop their knowledge and confidence.

A learning organisation
Safeguarding is continually evolving. The Trust is committed to learning from:

- safeguarding practice

- children's experiences
- local and national safeguarding reviews
- changes in statutory guidance
- emerging research
- developments in technology

This learning informs ongoing professional development and continuous improvement across all schools.

Key message: Policies and procedures help keep children safe. It is the everyday actions, professional judgement and trusted relationships of adults that make the greatest difference to children's lives.